



News Release

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2006 Most Active West Nile Virus Season Ever in Utah

Public Health Officials Report a Third Death Related to West Nile Virus

SALT LAKE CITY — The Utah Department of Health (UDOH) today announced that so far this year, 65 human cases of West Nile virus have been reported. At this point last year, only 12 cases had been reported. In addition, public health officials confirmed that a third death has occurred related to the virus. The Carbon County resident who died had exposure to the virus and was over the age of 65.

“If this season follows a pattern similar to last year, we could see more deaths and many more cases,” said Dr. Robert Rolfs, state epidemiologist, UDOH. “The end of summer, does not mark the end of West Nile virus. Utahns still need to protect themselves by wearing DEET and long sleeves and pants when outdoors from dusk until dawn.”

The risk of West Nile virus continues to exist statewide. Mosquitos carrying West Nile virus will continue to be around throughout September and even into October in warmer areas of the state.

Public health officials are concerned by the high number of cases and by the continuing high risk due to favorable conditions for mosquitoes. Roughly half of the reported human cases have been neuroinvasive, the most serious form of the disease. Approximately 1/3 of the cases have been hospitalized and three deaths have occurred. Although most cases have occurred in people over the age of 40, cases have been reported in infants through young adults. There is no age where the risk of disease does not exist.

The Carbon County resident was briefly hospitalized with neuroinvasive disease before his death. David Cunningham, Health Officer for Southeastern Utah District Health Department

states, “Mosquito activity has increased in our county in the last two weeks due to the recent storms. We expect it to get worse before it gets better”.

One in every five people exposed to the virus have severe flu-like symptoms with fever, muscle aches and possibly a rash. While those individuals recover, the illness can be prolonged. About one in 150 develop more severe illness affecting the brain and spinal cord. They may have headache, paralysis, and stiff neck, and may suffer long-lasting effects. Permanent disability and death can also result. “There is no treatment for West Nile virus, only supportive care,” said Rolfs. “Your best protection, is prevention.”

Exposure to WNV can occur anywhere, including at home. Mosquitoes often breed in backyards, wherever there is standing water. Preventing mosquito bites is the way to avoid getting WNV.

Utahns can protect themselves from mosquito bites by:

- Using mosquito repellents that contain DEET when outdoors from dusk to dawn.
- Wearing long-sleeved shirts and long pants while outdoors.
- Getting rid of standing water around your house to reduce the number of mosquitoes (old tires, buckets, wading pools, etc.).

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The mission of the Utah Department of Health is to protect the public’s health through preventing avoidable illness, injury, disability and premature death; assuring access to affordable, quality health care; and promoting healthy lifestyles.